

THE BLACK KITE

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The Black Kite (*Milvus migrans*) is another of the wonderful creatures that God made for His glory and man's pleasure. It is a medium-size bird of prey that occupies a wide range of territory throughout the temperate and tropical parts of Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia, and Oceania.

The name would suggest that it is black in color, but actually it is predominantly various shades of brown, with dark brown or black feathers toward the edges of its wings, a black beak, yellow legs, and black talons. There are some white markings under its wings and on its belly, and its head and neck tend to be paler than its body.

It glides effortlessly on air thermals searching for food with its excellent eyesight, soaring 1,000 feet and more above the ground.

Its magnificent eyes set into a head that can swivel 180 degrees gives it full awareness of its environment.

The Black Kite is an aerial acrobat, maneuvering quickly and easily in any direction, soaring, wheeling, diving. It swoops down on its prey with legs lowered, grabbing it with its powerful talons.

It eats fish, rodents, insects, reptiles, and other small creatures, as well as household refuse and carrion. It likes to fly above garbage dumps and along the edges of fires to catch escaping prey. The natives of Australia believed that the bird would start fires for this purpose by transporting burning branches and dropping them on dry brush.

Black Kites usually stay near bodies of water, such as rivers, ponds, or lakes. They are gregarious birds and can form huge flocks. I have seen probably 100 or more soaring above dumps in Kathmandu, Nepal.

They issue a fascinating shrill cry that ends with an extended warbling effect that varies considerably in speed and intensity.

European Black Kites generally migrate to Africa in the winter.

The Black Kite is believed to be monogamous, perhaps even pairing for life. They have a ritualized aerial courtship during which they "perform a dangerous display known as grappling, where they lock their feet together in mid-air and begin to spiral towards the ground" ("Black

Kite,” University of Michigan Museum of Zoology). The eggs are incubated by the female while the male feeds her. The chicks are cared for by both parents until the young are self-reliant.

Everything about this beautiful creature shouts “divine design,” from its DNA and its reproductive system to its brain and its incredible flying feathers. Each feather is composed of more than one million individual parts (including interlocking barbs and barbules) made up of billions of cells perfectly organized into a marvel of design.

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